

# Excavations at Oxford 1970

## THIRD INTERIM REPORT

By T. G. HASSALL

THROUGHOUT 1970 there was non-stop excavation or observation of building sites in the city by the Oxford Archaeological Excavation Committee (FIG. 1). The results achieved were rewarding. The first six months of the year were concentrated on the Westgate Centre and Selfridge's sites in St. Ebbe's (FIG. 2). During this time an intensive watching brief was maintained on the Westgate site during the contractor's excavation for the new Centre's service basement. This bulk mechanical excavation brought to light many rubbish pits and gave opportunities to section Castle Street, to examine a hitherto unknown barbican of Oxford castle, and to complete the plan of the Greyfriars church. On the Selfridge's site, excavation of 31-34 Church Street continued on a part-time basis by the Oxford University Archaeological Society until Easter, when building work began. Observation of the site continued until June; again more pits were located and Church Street was sectioned. In the same St. Ebbe's area a small section was excavated in April behind number 8 New Road to locate the castle moat on Oxfordshire County Council's Phase II development site.

During the year the Excavation Committee extended its activities away from St. Ebbe's (FIG. 1). In Trinity Term the Oxford University Archaeological Society began excavation on the site of 79-80 St. Aldate's and excavation on this site was then continued throughout the year on a full-time basis (FIG. 7).

During June and July a salvage operation was carried out at 44-46 Cornmarket Street, formerly the Cadena Café, and during the same period the city wall was sectioned in Merton College Grove. The last two excavations are fully reported elsewhere in this volume, while this Interim Report deals with the St. Ebbe's and St. Aldate's excavations. In addition to the excavations a general watch was maintained on all building sites throughout the city. Reference to this work is made in Notes and News and a post-medieval group of pottery recovered from Pembroke College is described by Mrs. J. de Goris.<sup>1</sup>

The chief burden of work fell on a small number of people. Sites were supervised by Messrs. B. Durham, J. Haslam, J. Huntriss, M. Robinson, A. Rogerson and T. Ward. The photographs were taken by Messrs. D. Carpenter and K. W. Sheridan, while overall site survey and the published plans were the responsibility of Mr. H. Richmond. Pottery was under the control of Miss J. S. Walker and Mrs. J. de Goris. Constant help was received from the Oxford City and County Museum, in particular from the Director, Miss J. M. Cook, who was succeeded during the year by Mr. Richard Foster. Mr. David Hinton of the Ashmolean Museum provided constant advice on matters relating to the pottery.

<sup>1</sup> p. 99.

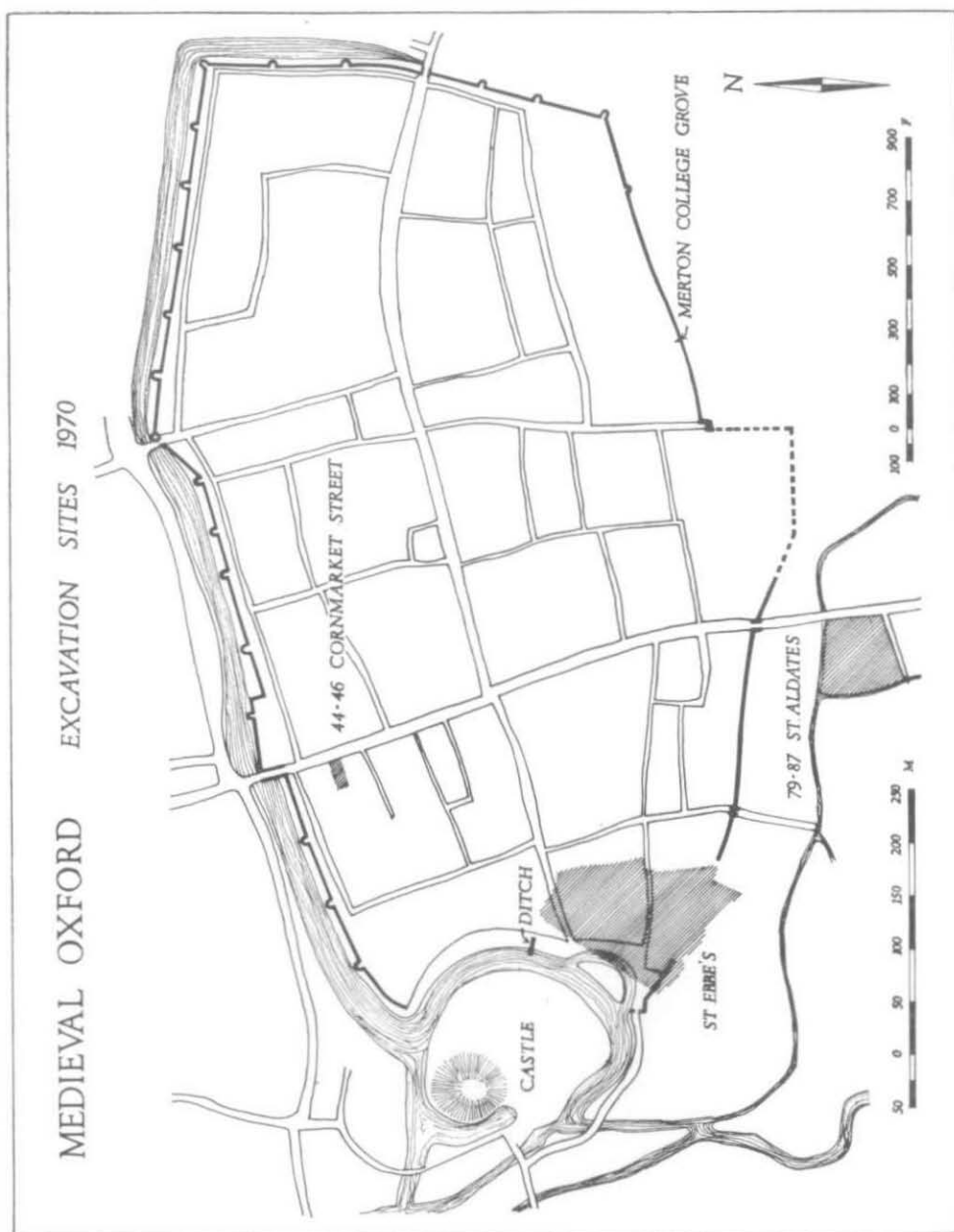


FIG. 1

The Excavation Committee is once again grateful for the help received from the two local authorities. The City Architect's, Engineer's and Estates Surveyor's Departments continued to provide unfailing assistance. Particular thanks must go to Miss C. M. Preston of the Town Clerk's Department, who took over as Assistant Honorary Secretary to the Excavation Committee when Miss Cook

retired as Honorary Secretary. The County Treasurer, Mr. H. C. Bedwell, and his staff, particularly Messrs. J. H. R. Day, H. Davies and M. Neate, controlled the Excavation Committee's financial arrangements. Thanks are also due to all the architects, engineers and contractors involved in the city's redevelopment, without whose co-operation the linked excavation programme would not be feasible.

# ST. EBBE'S SITES (FIG. 2 ; PL. I A)

## 31-34 CHURCH STREET

Excavation on the site of Whitehall and *domus* Mirifeld was brought to a close, although it did not prove possible to excavate all the deepest pits and wells.<sup>2a</sup> A little further structure was uncovered and it was confirmed that the post-hole building found last year on the *domus* Mirifeld site was in fact rectangular in plan. More pits were excavated, using techniques described in the last Interim Report. It was noticeable that the earliest pits, dating from the late Saxon period, were situated on the street frontage, e.g. : pit A 1556 in FIG. 5. A particularly useful group of early pottery came from pit 84.

The earliest feature found at 31-34 Church Street was a V-shaped ditch feature 502 (FIG. 2a, drawn by Mr. D. R. Sheard ; PL. IB). The ditch had been dug 1.15 m. into the natural gravel and was about 3 m. wide at its top ; there was no trace of an upcast on either side. The ditch had silted rapidly at first, principally from its western side, but there was no trace that it had ever been recut. The top fill of the ditch was very homogeneous and was redeposited red, brown loam which forms the capping of the natural gravel.

The ditch only survived at the front of the site, but its alignment was clearly north-south, at right angles to Church Street. The closure of the street made it possible to trace the ditch southwards under the lowest street surface (F 512), while to the north of the excavation bulldozing work momentarily revealed what appeared to be its continuation.

No dating evidence was found in the rapid silts of the ditch ; however, in the top-fill were sherds of various fabrics and dates, including grass-tempered wares of the seventh or eighth centuries, and fine shelly, St. Neots, ware which is unlikely to be earlier than the tenth century. Two of the middle Saxon sherds were decorated with small rosette stamps ; one of these has been paralleled by Mr. P. V. Addyman with sherds from Hamwih found in association with a coin of Offa (757-796).<sup>2b</sup> The lowest street surface sealing the ditch produced coarse and fine shelly wares. The street can therefore be dated to the tenth or early eleventh centuries. It is possible that the ditch was deliberately back-filled when the street was laid out. If this theory is correct then the ditch is likely to date from the early tenth century if not before.

<sup>2a</sup> For previous accounts of this site see : T. G. Hassall, 'Excavations at Oxford, 1968, First Interim Report', *Oxoniensia*, xxxiv (1969), 7-11 ; T. G. Hassall, 'Excavations at Oxford, 1969, Second Interim Report', *Oxoniensia*, xxxv (1970), 5-18.

<sup>2b</sup> Personal communication from Mr. P. V. Addyman.

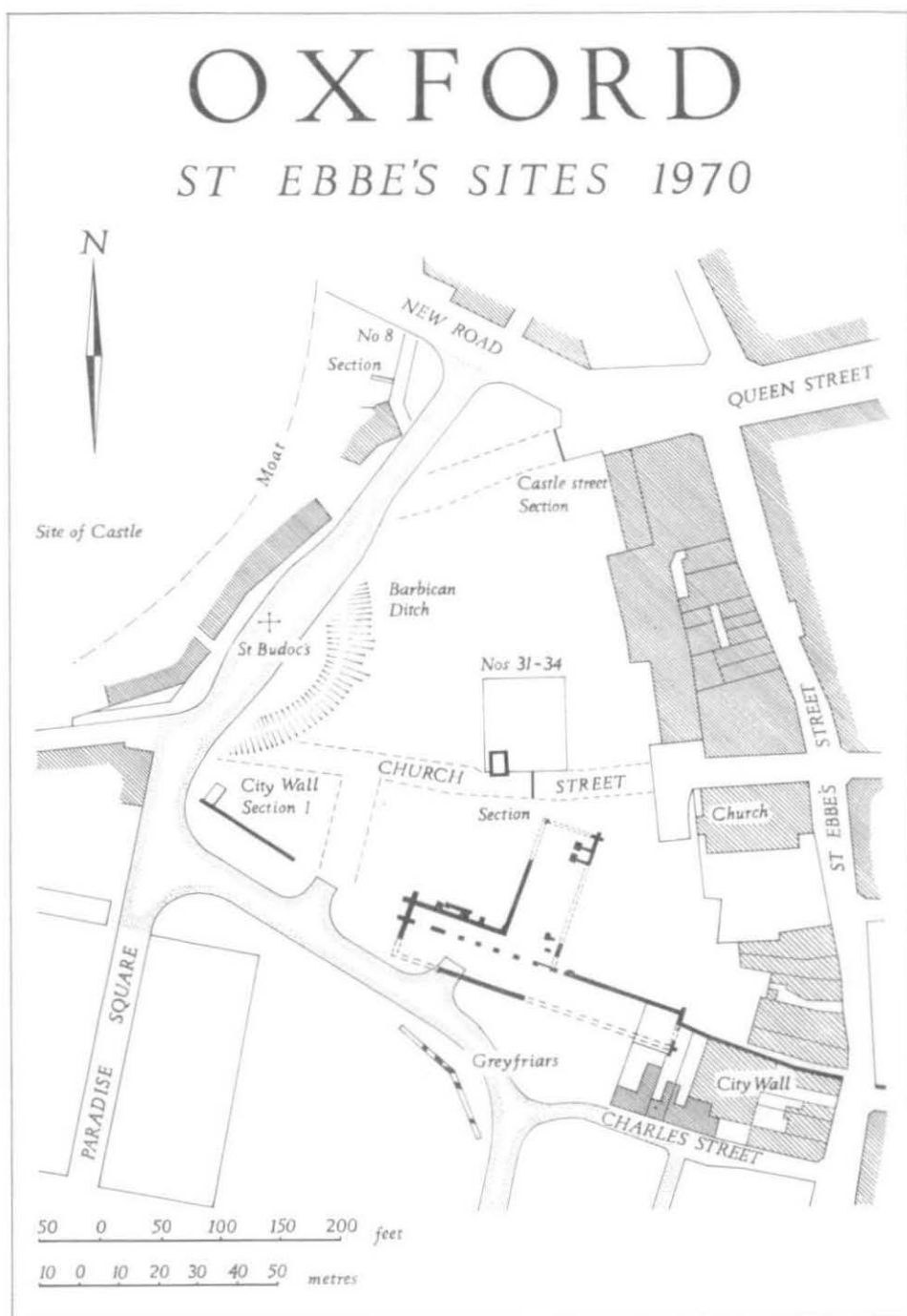


FIG. 2

*Based on the City of Oxford Central Area 1 : 500 Survey, by permission of the City Engineer.*

OXFORD

31-34 CHURCH STREET

1970

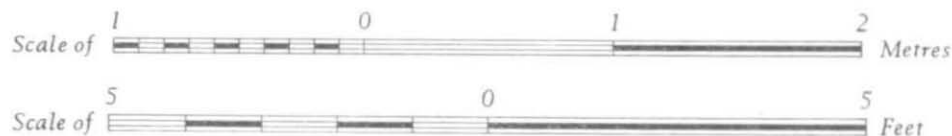
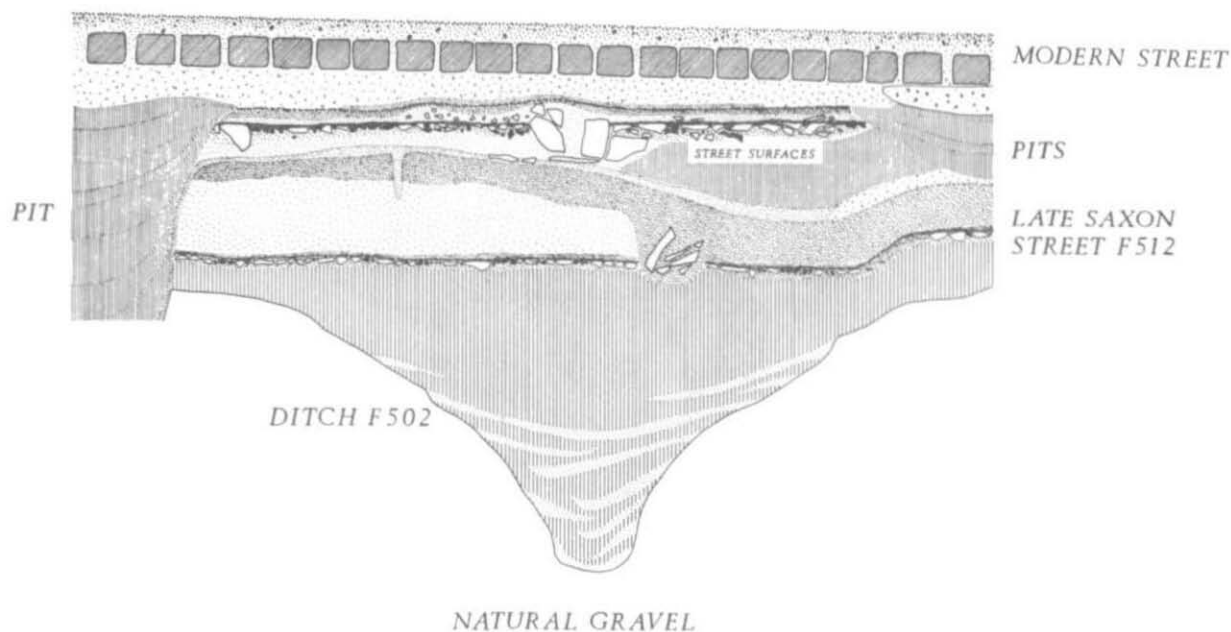
118/992.50

113/992.50

EAST

WEST

62.00



OD.M.  
59.00

FIG. 2a  
Possible Saxon defensive ditch.

It is difficult to assign a function to this ditch. It seems too large to be a property boundary ditch and the possibility that this ditch was part of the earliest western defence of the town cannot be ignored. If the town of the early tenth century was rectangular in plan, then, on the basis of the Burghal Hidage figures, this ditch in Church Street would be on the line that the western defences could be expected to take, not using the Thames as a natural defence.<sup>2c</sup> There would be the further implication that an extra-mural suburb grew up between the defence and the river which required at least one new road, Church Street, by the early eleventh century. This suburb would have been disturbed by the building of the Castle c. 1071.

### THE GREYFRIARS

*The Church* (FIGS. 2, 3 and 4 ; PLS. II A and B)

The main development and plan of the church were already clear by the end of last year's excavation.<sup>3</sup> The contractor's excavation in 1970 provided more information on the north extension and showed that it was even longer than originally supposed. A small excavation in June uncovered the south-east corner of the choir in the garden of number 9 Charles Street.

The new discoveries of 1970 mean that the phases of building of the Greyfriars church must now be slightly emended. Phases I-IV remain unaltered, but Phases V and VI of 1969 now become Phases VI and VII and a new Phase V has been added to the plan.

Phase V consisted of a three bay addition to the north extension. The footings of this phase had been deeply buried by post-Reformation material and remained very well preserved, unlike other parts of the building. The most useful discoveries related to the identification of chapels I-III. Chapel II was in a particularly dramatic state of preservation with the base for its altar intact and with impressions of floor tiles clearly preserved in the surviving mortar bedding (PLS. II A, B). Phase V must have been complete by 1480 when William Worcestre visited Oxford and it was probably built before the Black Death (1348).

The identification of Phase V with its chapels now means that William Worcestre's description and details of the building become intelligible.<sup>4</sup> It is now clear that the north extension is what William Worcestre aptly describes as the 'north nave', in which was ample space for the ten chapels he mentions. The position of six of the chapels can now be positively identified and the remainder can be inferred. Only one of William Worcestre's dimensions cannot be located on the ground and that is the length of the (north) nave from the south side to the north door. In the eight identifiable dimensions of William Worcestre in this building, his lowest length of step was 18.80" while his highest was 20.40", his average step being 19.83" as compared with his average of 20.43" during 1480 elsewhere.<sup>5</sup>

<sup>2c</sup> For a discussion of Oxford's defences see pp. 46-8.

<sup>3</sup> For previous accounts of this site: see T. G. Hassall, 'Excavations at Oxford, 1968, First Interim Report', *Oxoniensia*, xxxiv (1969), 11; T. G. Hassall, 'Excavations at Oxford, 1969, Second Interim Report', *Oxoniensia*, xxxv (1970), 10-15.

<sup>4</sup> J. H. Harvey, *William Worcestre* (1969), 273.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, xvii-xviii.

# OXFORD ST EBBE'S GREYFRIARS CHURCH

PLAN SHOWING FOOTINGS AS EXCAVATED

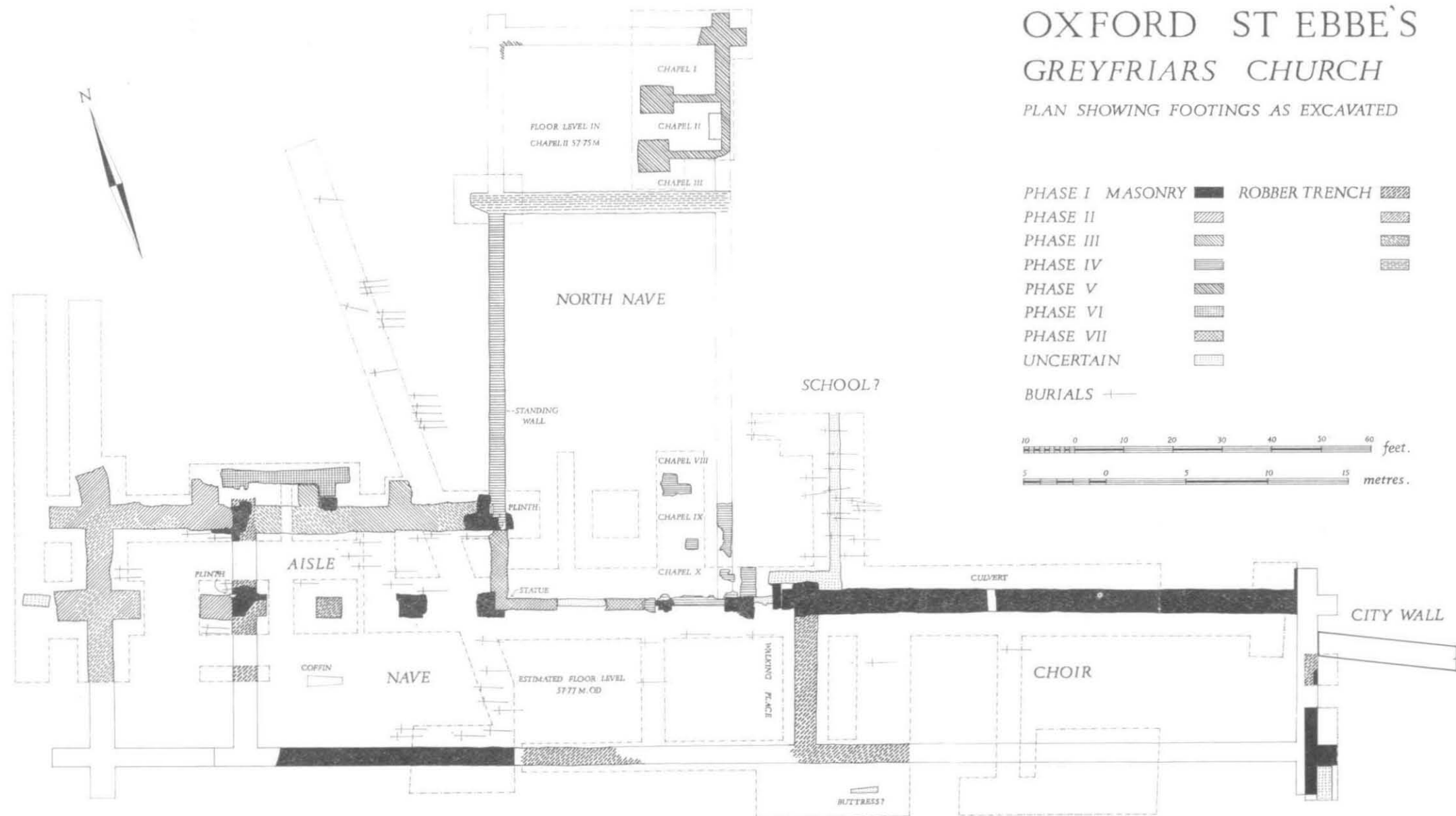
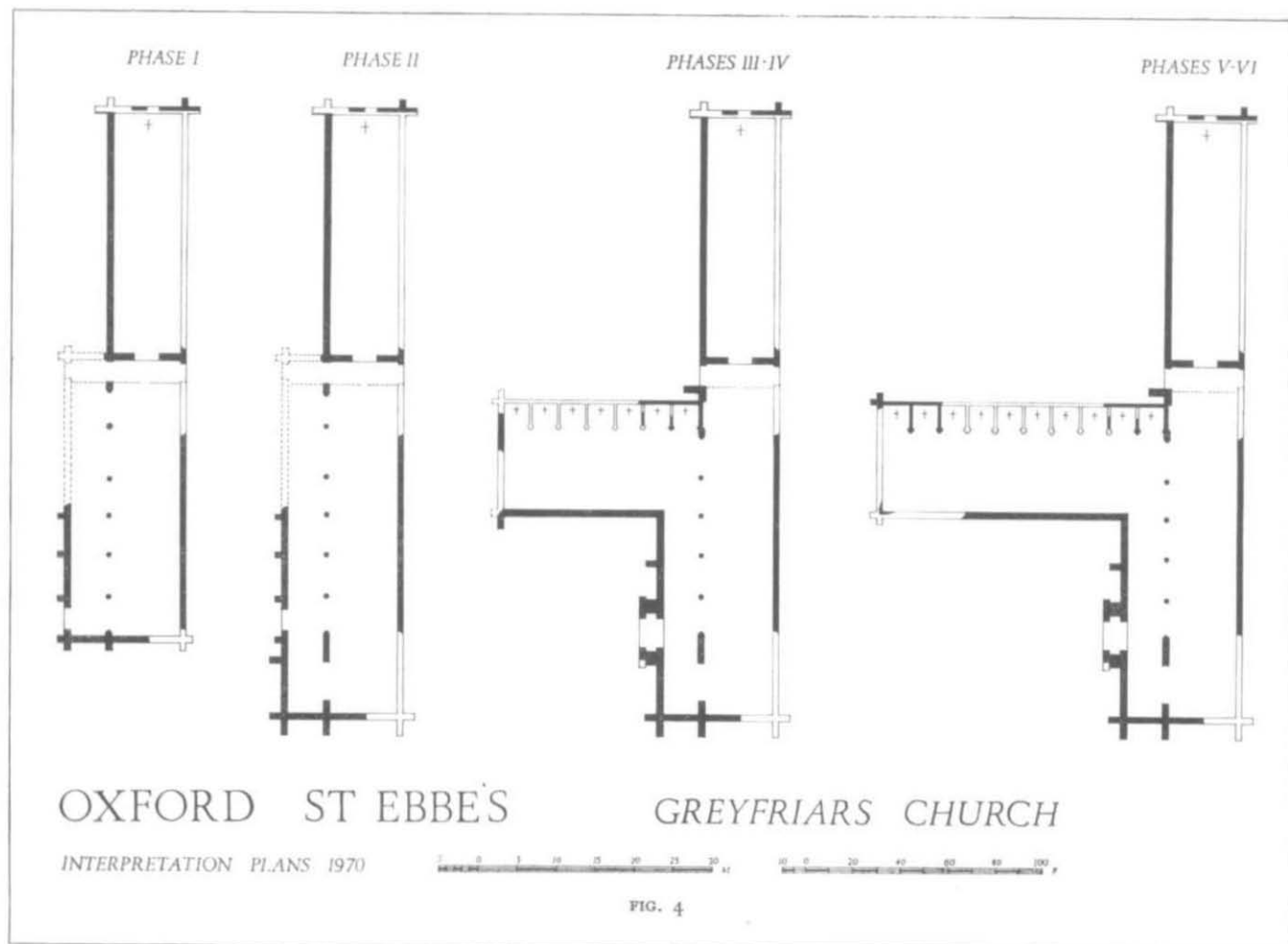


FIG. 3





A strange aspect of the siting of the church is its relationship to Church Street. The street level as shown in its section is considerably higher than the floor level of the church. The reason for this difference may be either that it is at this point that the second gravel terrace ends or that the gravel was artificially terraced in order to provide a level platform on which the church was then built.

The plan of the church is now as fully recovered as will ever be possible. Apart from the pier bases discovered in 1968, little if anything will have survived the recent building works.

#### *The Cloisters* (FIG. 2)

In 1971 an excavation of the cloisters of the Greyfriars is planned to precede the construction of the first phase of multi-storey car parks in St. Ebbe's. Accordingly in 1970 a rapid mechanical excavation was carried out south of the church to assess the potential of the site. Heavily robbed walls were encountered in areas not disturbed by modern cellars. These walls consisted of two parallel footings running north-south at right angles to the church and two more parallel footings running east-west in line with the church. These footings are probably connected with the cloisters. The excavation to locate the south-east corner of the choir also revealed a wall belonging to a further building adjacent to the corner buttress (FIG. 3).

#### CHURCH STREET SECTION (FIG. 5, PL. III A)

The Westgate Centre and Selfridge store development together have led to the closure of Church Street. The removal of the street gave opportunities to section it twice and one of these sections, feature W 50, is published in this Interim Report.

Although modern services and cellars on the south of the street had damaged much of the evidence, the information recovered is nevertheless valuable and is an addition to the growing evidence about the laying out of side streets within the town.

The road was found to be made up of eight distinct surfaces, including the latest modern surface. The lowest surface, 8, was well constructed of stones laid on the brown sub-soil which caps the natural gravel. This surface was presumably equivalent to F 512 in FIG. 2a. Neither this surface nor surface 7 produced any pottery, but on surface 6 were sherds of St. Neot's ware and a sherd of Stamford ware indicating an 11th century date. A pit, A 1556, containing similar material, was also cut through surfaces 7 and 8 from this level. Church Street must therefore have been laid out before the Conquest, in contrast to the evidence available for other side streets in the town.<sup>6</sup>

#### CASTLE STREET SECTION (FIG. 6 ; PL. III B)

The excavation for the new Westgate Centre's basement gave an opportunity to examine the construction of Castle Street at its junction with Queen Street.

<sup>6</sup> cf. David Sturdy, 'Excavations in Christ Church', *Oxoniensia*, xxvi/xxvii (1961/2), 30-31; Fabian Radcliffe, 'Excavations at Logic lane, Oxford', *Ibid.*, 46, 68.

# OXFORD ST EBBE'S

## CHURCH STREET NORTH-SOUTH SECTION

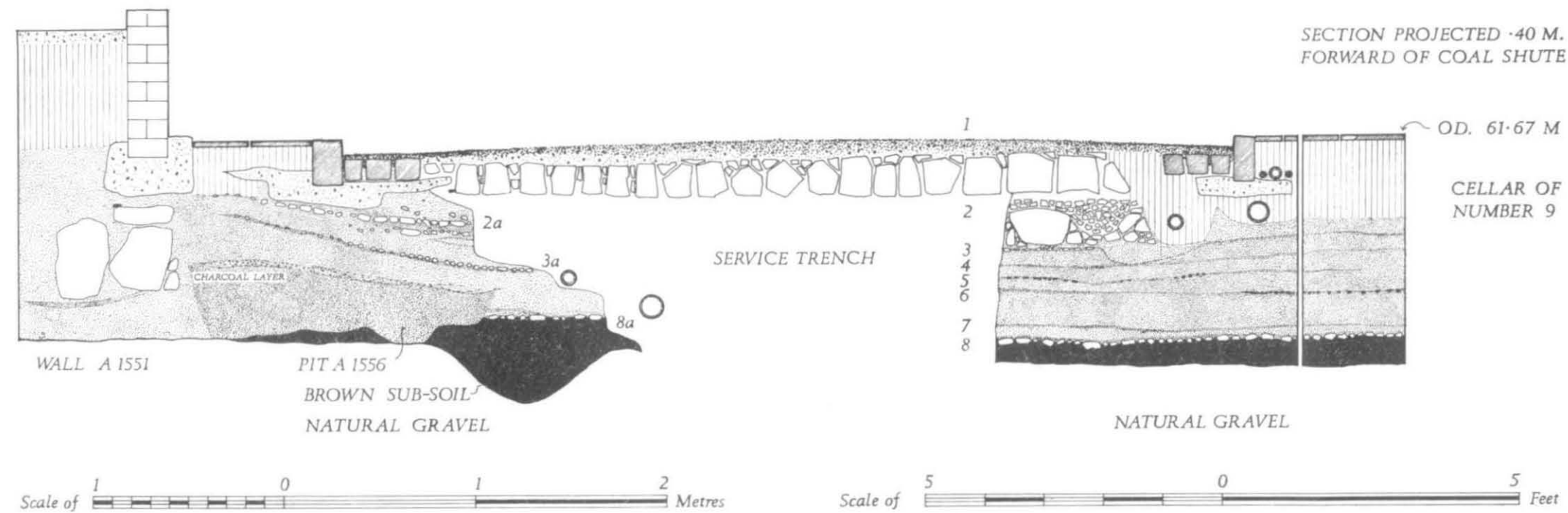


FIG. 5

# OXFORD STEBBE'S

## CASTLE STREET PROJECTED SECTION

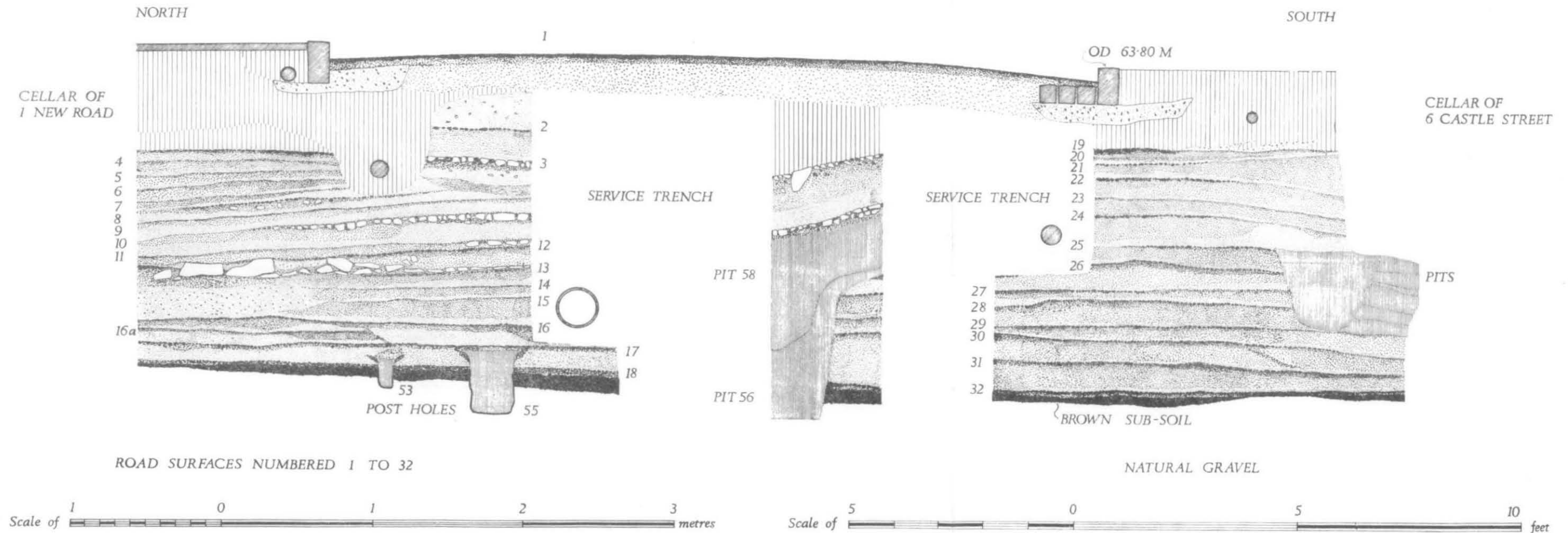


FIG. 6

This street which is the direct continuation of the High Street formed the east-west axis of the medieval town. Before the building of the castle in c. 1071 the road presumably continued in a due westerly direction to the Thames, but during the medieval period all traffic had to make an awkward detour around the south-eastern side of the castle to reach the Westgate. The Mileways Act of 1770 provided for the construction of New Road across the site of the bailey and from that time Castle Street diminished in importance.

Castle Street, feature W 54, like Church Street, was found to be very disturbed by modern services, but in spite of these it was possible to identify a total build-up of eighteen road surfaces on the north side of the street (surfaces 1-18) and thirteen on the south side (surfaces 19-32). Each late Saxon and medieval surface consisted of a spread of gravel, possibly derived from the excavation of rubbish pits in the adjoining property. The surfaces were all covered by an accumulation of dark road silt.

A sherd of cooking pot rim in St. Neot's ware came from surface 32, which was the lowest surface and rested directly on the brown sub-soil which caps the natural gravel. This ware is not thought to have been introduced to the Oxford region until the 11th century, although in the Cambridge region it was in production by c. 850. The same ware was present in surface 13.

There were encroachments into the street at various levels. In the accumulation of silt between surfaces 17 and 18 there were two post-holes (53 and 55). In the centre of the road were three pits, 56, 58 and 57; the latter is not on the published section. These pits are not easy to date since they contained mainly undistinctive coarse wares, but in pit 56 there were single sherds of Stamford ware and St. Neot's ware indicating an 11th century date. It is difficult to imagine the context in which these pits were permitted to be dug, although further to the east Butcherrow formed a permanent encroachment from the 16th century and probably earlier. It is possible that the building of the castle may have led to a temporary closure of the street, thus allowing pits to be dug.

## THE CASTLE

### *The Eastern Barbican* (FIG. 2; PL. IV A)

In 1969 the site of St. Budoc's church was identified.<sup>7</sup> This church was destroyed in 1216 by Fawkes de Bréauté when he was strengthening the defences of the castle after its capture in the Barons' War.<sup>8</sup> The contractors working on the Westgate Centre's basement uncovered the ditch of a large barbican and it is clear that this ditch must represent more of Fawkes de Bréauté's work.

In plan the ditch formed a semi-circle in front of the main gate to the castle and it must have been connected at both ends with the main moat. There was presumably a wall around the barbican. In 1327 £800 was spent on repairs to the castle including the mantlet wall (*mantellum*) in front of the great gate.<sup>9</sup>

<sup>7</sup> T. G. Hassall, 'Excavations at Oxford, 1969, Second Interim Report', *Oxoniensia*, xxxv (1970), 18.

<sup>8</sup> *Rot. Lit. Claus.* Vol. 1, 498; *Close Rolls*, 1227-31, 350; 1234-7, 71.

<sup>9</sup> H. M. Colvin, *History of the King's Works* (1963) II, 774.

There must also have been a bridge connecting the barbican with Castle Street. The presence of the barbican must also imply that Castle Street on its pre-1969 alignment can only have post-dated the abandonment of the barbican, since it cut across the latter. In the *Map of Medieval Oxford*, H. E. Salter shows that the tenements next to the castle stopped well to the east of the barbican on what must represent the eastern side of the road in the thirteenth century.<sup>10</sup>

It is difficult to be precise about the date at which the barbican was abandoned. The ditch must have silted up within about two hundred years, since there is no sign of it in Agas' Map of 1578.<sup>11</sup> The ditch as excavated, was full of black mud extending below the formation level of the new building. As a result the whole ditch had to be dug out mechanically and back-filled with concrete up to formation level. During the mechanical excavation it was possible to recover a great deal of material from the filling of the ditch, including about 1200 pieces of leather, amongst which were knife sheaths and many fragments of shoes. The conservation of this material was carried out by Mr. B. V. Arthur of the Oxford City and County Museum.

#### *The Moat (FIG. 2)*

A small mechanical excavation was carried out behind 8 New Road to confirm the line taken by the castle moat. The lip of the moat was identified and the sides of the moat were followed down to a depth of 5 m. The site has now become a temporary car park, but further work should be possible when Oxfordshire County Council begins its Phase II development early in 1972.

### ST. ALDATE'S SITES (FIG. 7)

#### *The Survey Area*

The Bridewell Square redevelopment off St. Aldate's has given an opportunity to examine the archaeology of Oxford's south suburb. The area in question lies half way between the site of the Southgate and Folly Bridge. It is defined to the north and to the west by the line of the Trill Mill Stream and the Blackfriars' Mill Stream and to the east and to the south by St. Aldate's and Speedwell Street, known during the medieval period as Overee's Lane.

The redevelopment scheme has already involved the realignment of Speedwell Street. In 1970 the reconstruction of the old Bridewell Square began with the construction of a new chapel for the Catholic Chaplaincy on the north side of the square to be followed in 1971 by shops and offices on the south side. Along the St. Aldate's frontage the site of nos. 79 to 81 will be redeveloped, but nos. 83 to 87 will remain.

It was decided that it would be best to treat the whole redevelopment as one survey area and to publish plans of the standing structures as well as carrying out excavations. The structural survey will be undertaken by Mr. H. Richmond.

<sup>10</sup> H. E. Salter, *Map of Mediaeval Oxford* (1934), Map 4.

<sup>11</sup> Agas, Hollar and Loggan, *Old Plans of Oxford*, O.H.S., xxxviii (1899).

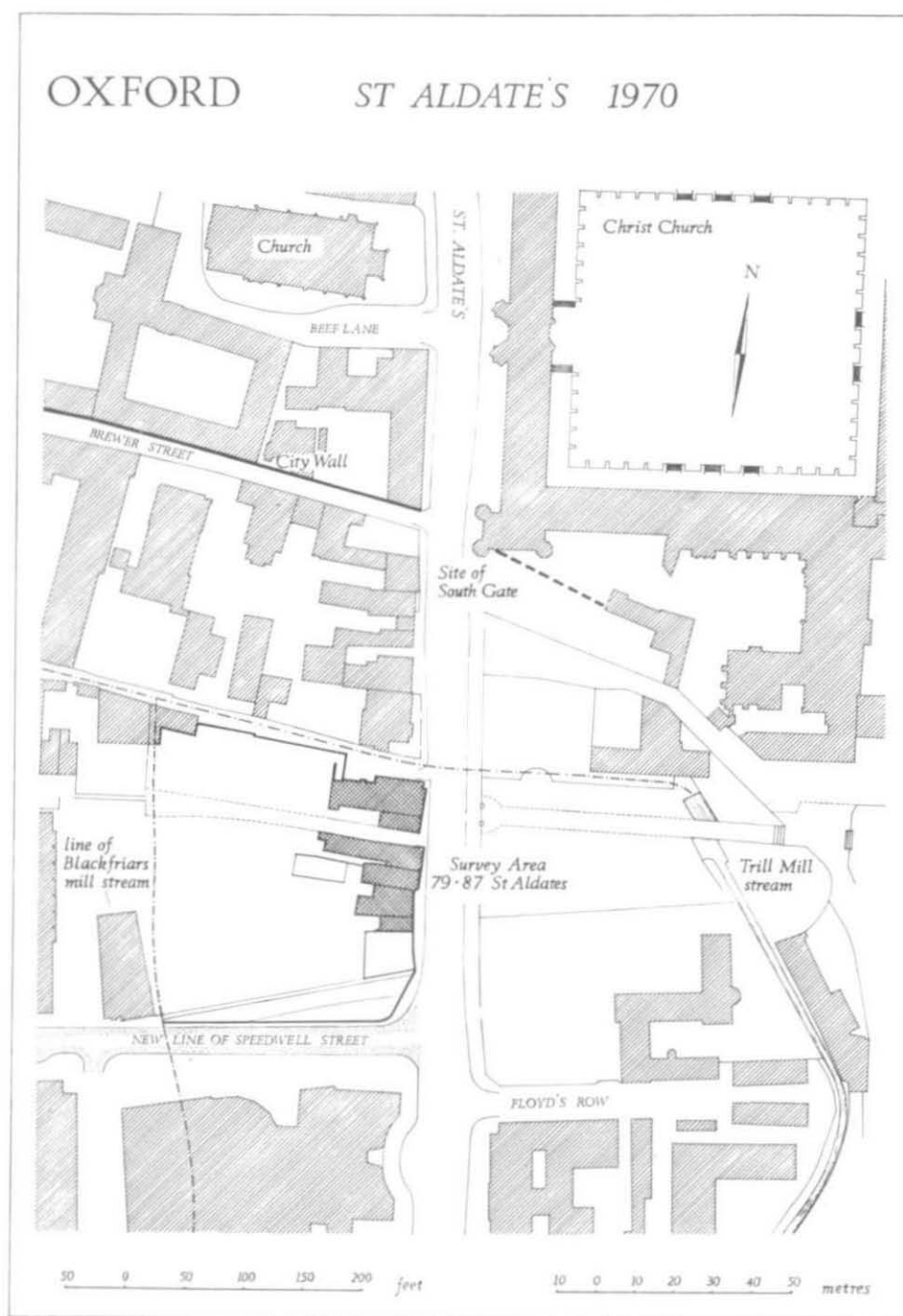


FIG. 7

*Based on the City of Oxford Central Area 1:500 Survey, by permission of the City Engineer.*



The houses have already been described by the Royal Commission on Historical Monuments and no. 87, the Old Palace, has been published by Dr. W. A. Pantin.<sup>12</sup>

The documentation for the site has already been covered by H. E. Salter in the *Survey of Oxford*.<sup>13a</sup> It may be necessary to study the documentary history of the site into the nineteenth century in order to examine how the original Bridewell Square was developed.

In 1970 archaeology on the site involved observation of the Catholic Chaplaincy site and excavation on the site of nos. 79-80 St. Aldate's. No prior excavation was carried out on the chapel site and the new building, although having piled foundations, has very shallow ground beams and consequently no pit groups were recovered. At 79-80 St. Aldate's it was decided to carry out a full excavation.

### *79-80 St. Aldate's*

This site soon showed that modern disturbance was minimal, probably owing to the high modern water table preventing excavation for cellars. The site has therefore produced a stratified sequence of occupation with associated structures quite unlike anything that was recovered from St. Ebbe's. Unfortunately soon after the excavation began, no. 81, the building adjacent to the site, was declared unsafe and the Corporation restricted excavation to the site of no. 79.

The excavation has so far produced four main structural phases, although it is clear that the stratification of occupation levels continues below the earliest coherent structure. These early occupation levels should provide a date for the primary settlement of the site. The first phase can be provisionally dated to the early 13th century when the site of both 79 and 80 was occupied by a single building with stone footings which lay parallel to St. Aldate's.

By 1279 the site had been divided by a wall and the Hundred Rolls record two houses on the site.<sup>13b</sup> From this time onwards until the 17th century the ground plan of the two buildings remained unaltered, although the occupation levels built up within the walls of each house unit.

In FIG. 8, no. 79, the corner building, is shown at layer 119 (PL. IV B). This layer was dated by a cut farthing from a Long Cross penny of 1247-79. By this time the division of the property into two houses had taken place. The newly formed corner building had had its west wall rebuilt. The south which fronted on to Overee's Lane must still lie under the modern pavement. In the centre of the floor was a large hearth, F 120, with a smaller one, F 130, near it. F 121, F 122 and F 129 were post-holes. To the west of the house there was a small lean-to structure represented by the robber trench, F 116, and post base, F 135. Owing to the wet nature of the ground, all the larger post-holes had single flat stones at their bases to stop posts sinking and rotting. The lean-to may

<sup>12</sup> Royal Commission on Historical Monuments, *City of Oxford*, (1939) 174-5, nos. 151-154; W. A. Pantin, 'Development of Domestic Architecture in Oxford', *Antiq. Journ.*, xxvii, 134.

<sup>13a</sup> H. E. Salter, *Survey of Oxford*, II, O.H.S. N.S., xx (1969), 18-30.

<sup>13b</sup> *Ibid.*, 21, 22.

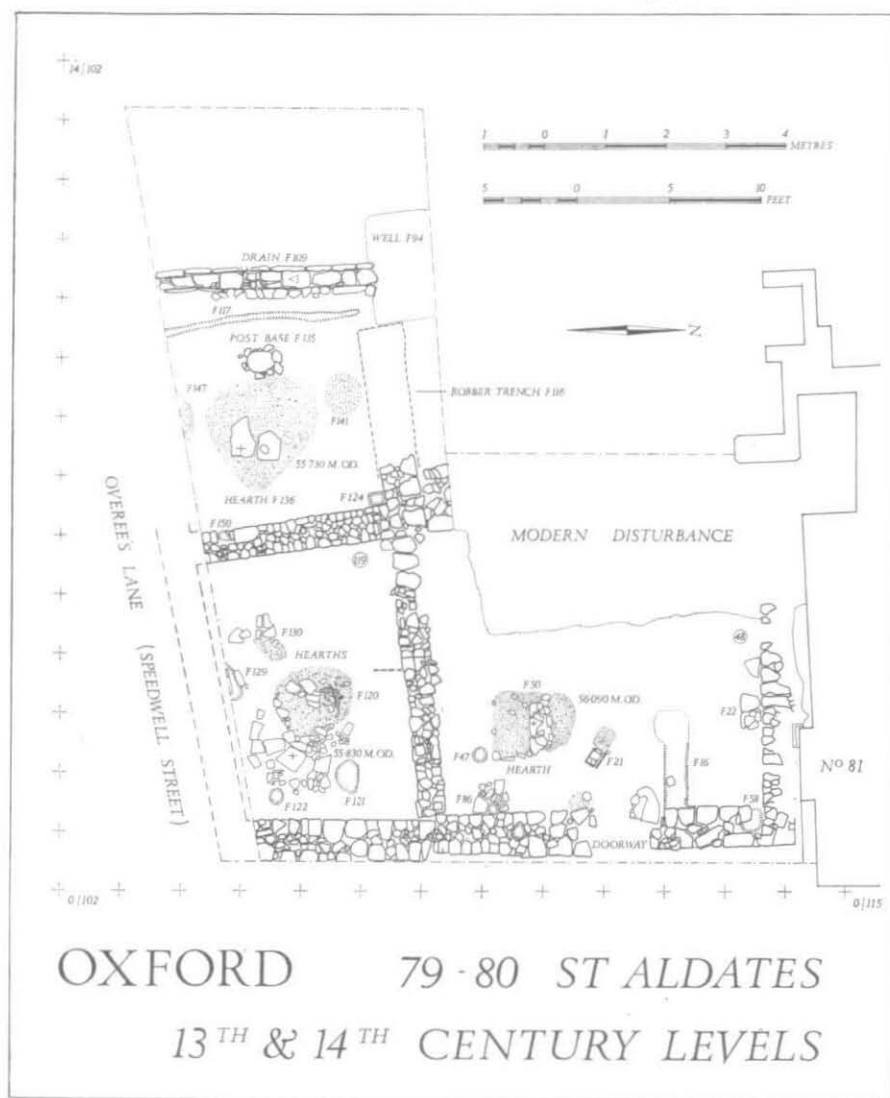


FIG. 8

have been some form of workshop and was associated with hearths F 136, F 141 and F 147. In the garden was a well-built stone drain, F 109.

This corner tenement is very fully documented.<sup>14</sup> In 1439, Oseney Abbey leased it for four shillings to Nicholas Fairway and his wife Joan. The lease gives a full description of the building, which is unusual. It is described as a shop with a solar above. The measurements of the building, as opposed to the whole tenement, are given as 10' 1" along the high road (St. Aldate's) and 16' 2" along

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, 22.



the lane (Overee's Lane). These dimensions are very close to the dimensions of the footings of the building as actually excavated.

80 St. Aldate's has only been excavated down to the 14th century levels owing to the restriction imposed on the excavation. In FIG. 8 the building is shown at layer 48, an occupation level dated by a late 14th century pfenig from south Germany. This building had its western wall disturbed, but its northern and eastern walls were still intact. The front wall had a doorway with a small screen, F 16, on its northern side. This building had a hearth, F 50, and post-holes F 47, F 58 and F 86 were associated with this level. F 21 was also some form of post-hole, carefully lined stone tiles set on edge.

During the 16th and 17th centuries minor modifications to both buildings took place, but it was not until the 18th century that there was a major rebuilding. At that time the front walls of both buildings were set forward under the present pavement line and a large chimney stack, resting on wooden piles, was built in no. 79. At the end of the last century both buildings were rebuilt as one.

Further excavation is planned within the limited area still available for examination which should provide more occupation levels, although probably no more coherent structures.

The following have made grants or donations in 1970 : Ministry of Public Building & Works ; Oxford City Council ; Oxford Preservation Trust ; Oxfordshire County Council ; Pilgrim Trust ; British Academy ; Society of Antiquaries ; All Souls College ; Balliol College ; Brasenose College ; Christ Church ; Corpus Christi College ; Exeter College ; Jesus College ; Keble College ; Lady Margaret Hall ; Lincoln College ; Merton College ; New College ; Nuffield College ; Oriel College ; Pembroke College ; Queen's College ; St. Anne's College ; St. Antony's College ; St. Catherine's College ; St. Hilda's College ; St. Hugh's College ; St. John's College ; St. Peter's College ; Somerville College ; Trinity College ; University College ; Wadham College ; Worcester College ; B. H. Blackwell Ltd. ; Basil Blackwell & Mott Ltd. ; Blackwell Scientific Publications Ltd. ; and other private donors.

#### ERRATUM

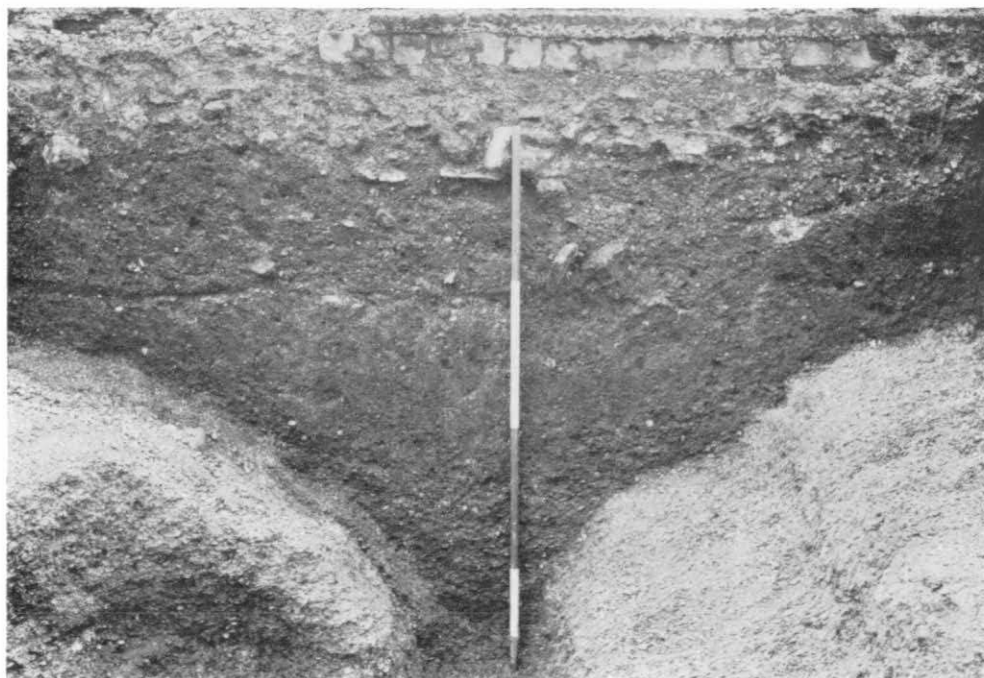
T. G. Hassall, 'Excavations at Oxford 1968 : First Interim Report', *Oxoniensia*, XXXIV (1969), Fig 4. Caption should read : 'Late 12th-early 14th century pottery from stone-lined pit.'

*The Society acknowledges with gratitude a publication grant from the Department of the Environment for this paper.*

PLATE I

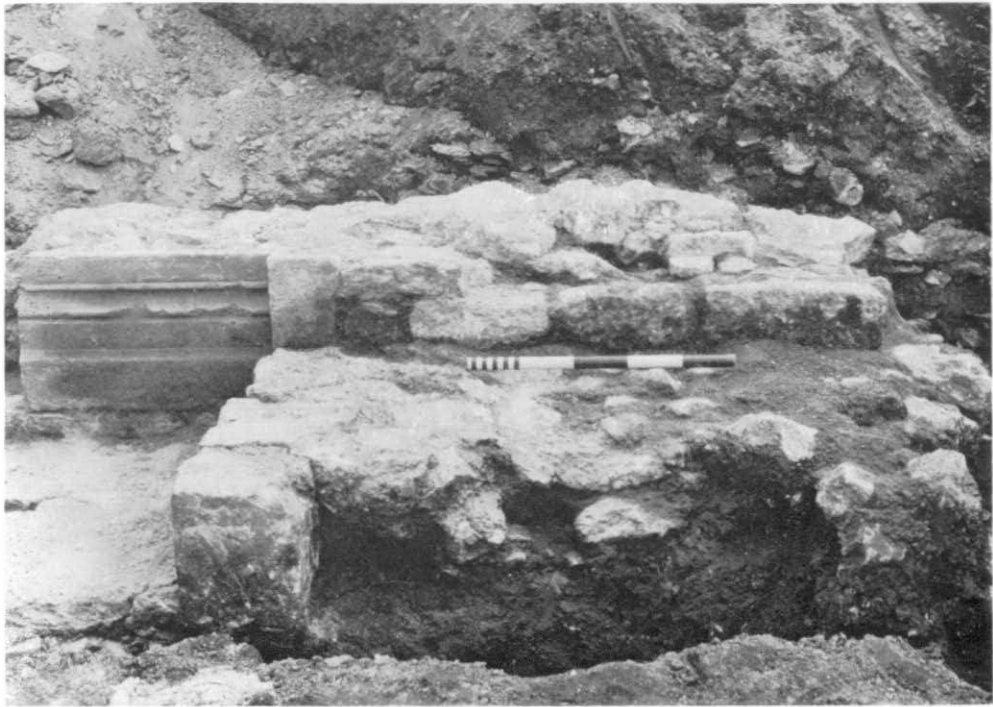


A. General view of St. Ebbe's sites, Oxford, from the south with the Greyfriars church in the foreground on the right and 31-34 Church Street behind.



B. 31-34 Church Street, Oxford. Possible Saxon defensive ditch, feature 502. Scale = 2 m.  
Photos: K. W. Sheridan

PLATE II

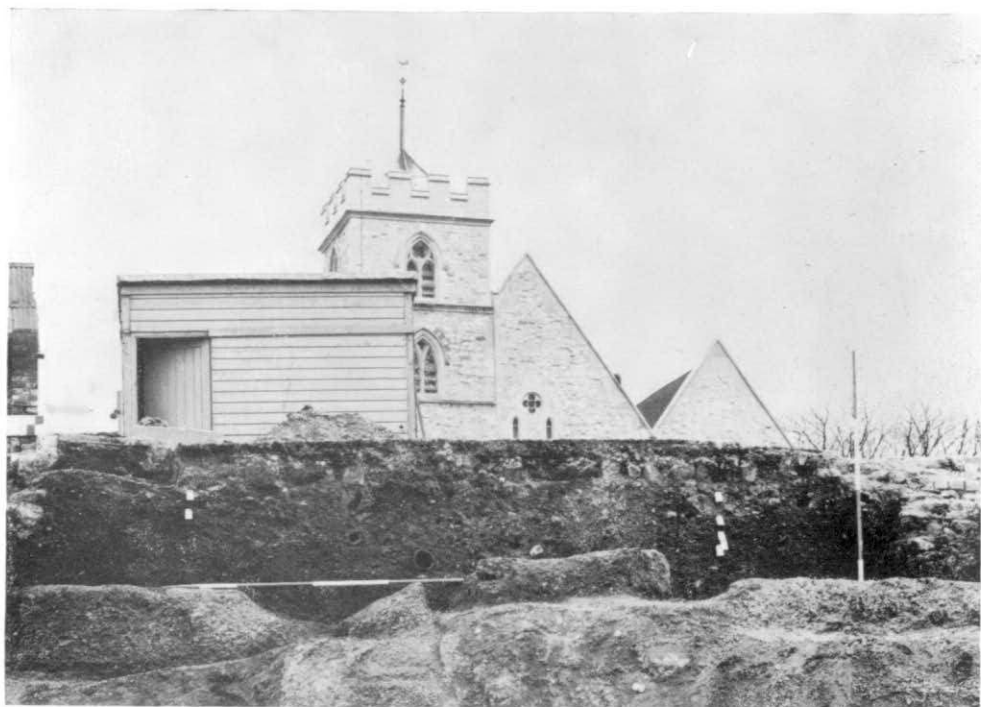


A. Greyfriars church, Oxford. Chapel II, the altar from the west. Scale = 50 cm.



B. Greyfriars church, Oxford. Chapel II, the impression of floor tiles in the surviving mortar bedding. Scale = 50 cm.

*Photos : T. E. Ward*



A. Church Street, Oxford. Section W 50 from the west, showing street surfaces, resting on natural gravel. Scales = 2 m.



B. Castle Street, Oxford. Section W 54 from the west, showing street surfaces at the junction of Queen Street, Castle Street and New Road. Scales = 2 m.

*Photos : K. W. Sheridan*



A. The castle barbican, Oxford. The mechanical excavation and back-filling from the north-east.



B. 79 St. Aldate's, Oxford. Thirteenth-century phase with small building at the front of the site and garden behind from the west. Scales = 2 m.

*Photos : K. W. Sheridan and David Carpenter*